

## **Frequently Asked Questions on the Shutdown's Effects on VA**

***Q. Will veterans get their November benefit checks?***

A. No. If the lapse in appropriations affecting VA's mandatory benefits accounts is not addressed, veterans will not receive their November benefits checks. This includes payments for compensation, pensions, education (monthly stipends) and vocational rehabilitation. Since October 1, VA has been making these payments using carryover fiscal year 2013 funds. These funds are expected to run out in late October. Without new appropriations to replenish these accounts, VA will not be able to make further payments.

***Q. Will veterans who don't receive their benefit checks in November, eventually get paid the full amount to which they are entitled?***

A. Yes. When the lapse in appropriations is addressed, VA will resume making benefit payments. These will include payments for the current period, and any back pay for benefits that were delayed.

***Q. What will happen to the claims backlog as a result of the government shutdown?***

A. The backlog will get worse. Prior to the lapse in funding, VA was making some progress on reducing the backlog utilizing mandatory overtime. On October 1, VA was forced to suspend mandatory overtime. The VA Secretary testified on October 9 that, since this suspension, VA had seen an increase in the backlog of approximately 1,400 claims per day.

***Q. Have claims processors been sent home?***

A. Currently, claims processors have been exempted and continue to work despite the lapse in appropriations. When the VA runs out of money to make benefit payments these claims processors will be furloughed and, the processing of veterans' disability claims will be suspended. VA will retain a minimal number of exempted employees to officially accept claims and date stamp them. (The date stamp is important because it reserves the veteran's "date of claim.")

***Q. What will happen to veterans who were expecting to get educational benefits to pay for school classes or for their monthly stipend?***

A. Because most academic institutions began the fall semester prior to October 1, most payments to schools for classes have already been paid. Monthly living stipends for November and following months will likely not be paid if the lapse in appropriations is not addressed.

***Q. What about health care? Are medical facilities open? Are appointments being cancelled?***

A. VA medical care services and facilities have not been affected by the lapse in appropriations. VA medical care, because of advance appropriations, had a budget in place beginning on October 1 and all VA medical facilities are open and operating normally. This includes: inpatient and outpatient care, prescriptions, surgeries, dental treatment, extended care, mental health care, nursing home care, and special health care services for women veterans.

***Q: What VA services are available to my district office and caseworkers during the shutdown?***

A. The VA and VA Regional Offices (VAROs) have limited and dwindling staff. As the lapse in appropriations continues, fewer and fewer functions will be supported. VA Regional Offices are unable to support Congressional inquiries. You should refer to the VA Field Guide for specifics on what is and is not affected by the shutdown - [http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Field\\_Guide\\_20130927.pdf](http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Field_Guide_20130927.pdf) . Caseworkers should still be able to track their veteran constituent's, and the 1-800 number is still in operation for questions regarding a veterans claim. Caseworkers may also want to reach out to Veteran Service Officers from local VSO chapters.

***Q. What can my Member do to protect veterans if there are future shutdowns?***

A. Your Member can sign onto a bipartisan letter signed by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Michaud calling on Speaker Boehner to bring H.R. 813, as amended, the Putting Veterans Funding First Act, to the floor for a vote. H.R. 813, as amended,, was unanimously reported out of Committee, Advanced appropriations of VA's medical care accounts is what has enabled veterans' health care to have funding in place and remain unaffected by the current government shutdown. The Putting Veterans Funding First Act would provide this level of funding security for the remaining VA discretionary accounts and provide VA with a more robust and analytical advanced financial planning framework for VA budgets.

***Q. If VA is reliant on other government agencies for information and support to do its mission, what affect would funding just the VA have on restoring veteran benefits and services?***

A. The VA heavily relies on multi-agency partnerships to help serve the needs of all veterans. Key agencies that VA needs to engage with include the Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), Small Business Administration (SBA), and Internal Revenue Service. Fully restoring veteran benefits and services requires that all federal agencies be funded, and the whole of government be re-opened.